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Random Profile

He Won A National Award

By H. K.

Memories of school days are invariably nostalgic. Time rounds off the sharp edges of memory and wipes away childish tears leaving only a hazy glow of happy days; carefree days of laughter and games, clownish school masters and boy-heroes of daring escapades and defied discipline.

In contrast a parent's current thinking on school and education is circumscribed by parental anxiety and the political vagaries of the government's educational policy.

Famous Teachers

In all these thoughts seldom does the headmaster figure. He lurks in the shadows, an inscrutable object doing his rounds of the deserted corridors during class hours or immutably ordering the destiny of a thousand boys during the ten month period of the school year.

There was a time once however in Tamilnadu when



schools were made famous by their headmasters, who set up hoary traditions spanning the decades with their influence over the school and with the famous men they turned out. The problems associated with an explosion in the numbers of school-going children and its consequences have changed all that.

Delhi has instituted a tradition of calling forth, during the Republic Day celebrations every year, some of the country's outstanding headmasters and exposing them to the limelight for a

brief moment before they are again turned over to their school and thence banished into retirement.

The headmaster of the Ramakrishna Mission school in the city, Mr O.V. Gopalan received a communication in September last, announcing in its characteristic bald style that he had been nominated for an award, and would he confirm his acceptance and forward a speech he could read out for their scrutiny, taking care to couch it in acceptable, grammatical form?

Old-World Values

Mr Gopalan is a tall, spare man nearing his sixties. He wears the traditional Jubba and Dhotie in white Khadhar, and presents an appearance of a schoolmaster who is a die-hard conservative with old-world values. However successive meetings dispel all such gloomy anticipation for Mr Gopalan while holding to traditional values has adapted his techniques to modern trends and attitudes.

The Indian Review

sour, he found that he had gifted the Israelis the largest chunk of territory the Arabs were to lose on the Syrian front.

It is now conceded by military experts everywhere that the entire Egyptian Plan for the War was worked out by the Egyptians themselves. The Russians knew of Egypt's plans to commence action but were totally unaware of the details of Egyptian operations.

The Egyptian Plan

The Egyptian plan was based on four premises. *That* the Israelis, "drunk with arrogance", would take any Arab attack lightly. *That* long supply lines would make it impossible for Israel to counter a two-front invasion successfully. *That* Israel's population was too small to withstand high casualty rates and therefore, the initial assault must be massive in order to inflict maximum casualties, accounting for the Chinese-style "human waves" which initially engulfed the Israelis on both fronts. *That* Israel's economy could not stand a long war—and so, after the

initial successes, a war of attrition was planned.

Yom kippur was chosen as D-Day for specific reasons. It offered a full moon and just the right currents to make the Canal crossing practicable and according to a pre-tested timetable. That the Israelis would least expect an attack on this day was a purely secondary reason. In fact, it is now generally accepted, that not only did Israeli intelligence know of the Egyptian plans but so did the U S—TWO MONTHS before the attacks! But the Israeli Government -- and especially Dayan's Defence Ministry — just would not believe the Arabs (anticipatingly cowed by Israeli superiority) would DARE to attack!

Israel & US Knew

D-Day for Operation Badr—named after a battle The Prophet fought and won against great odds during the month of Ramazan — was known upto a month before the invasions to *only three* people: President Sadat, C-in-C Ismail and "Al Ahram's" editor, Mohammed Hassanein Heikal, who published various lulling rumours, one of which was

about plans for servicemen to go on Hajj pilgrimage. By the time the news of war plans trickled down to soldier-level there was only anywhere between 48 and 8 hours left for invasion.

Israel had planned to meet invasion by igniting the Canal which was to be covered with inflammable oil and chemicals. But on the night before the Canal-crossing, Egyptian Commandos slipped behind Israeli lines and cut the hoses.

Human-Wave-Assault

Once the invasion began, the Egyptians mounted a Chinese-style "human-wave" assault and Col. Ammon Resheff of Israel's famed 14th Armoured Brigade had, with his 240 Patton tanks, to withstand wave after wave of assault. 24-hours after the first wave, when the Egyptian attack petered out, Resheff had only 90 tanks left!

One of Israel's top-military men, commenting on what the world has now come to realise was "the War the World lost", has said, "Resheff will go down in history as the man who saved Israel on the Day of Atonement." So much for Sharon!

His career at the Ramakrishna Mission High School for nigh 35 years reveals a mind alive to changing conditions and a willingness to meet the challenge.

Mr Gopalan came to Madras a child with his parents in the second decade of the century and studied in a then famous school in Mylapore. His father was a Sanskrit Pandit and life was not easy for the children. Gopalan passed out of the Christian College which was then situated in Thambu Chetty St. an aging, commercial part of the city. He joined the Ramakrishna Mission School in 1939.

The school was the creation of the Ramakrishna Mission in Madras and Shri Vasudeva-charya, whose name was synonymous with the Mission's activities took keen interest in the school.

Mission's Ideals

The Mission's ideals of public service and dedication to religious awakening has remained with the school over the years. The headmaster feels that inculcation of a religious discipline based on prayer and faith is essential for his boys, to meet the challenges of changing social patterns. Every year the teenagers leaving school, are assembled on the eve of their exams and given a hearty send off and presented with books

that expound the "inner strength that religious thoughts provide. This year each of the thousand students leaving school received a copy of the Bhagavad Gita, a book entitled 'Vivekananda's call to the nation' etc. The prevailing atmosphere of these farewells is religious.

School Magazine

Mr Gopalan approached his early years given to teaching mathematics with interest. The world war was on when he joined. By the time the war ended and the days of make-shift blackboards and buff coloured writing paper were over, he was teaching other subjects as well and had started a manuscript magazine for the school. The magazines of those years which he brought out and opened with loving care for inspection are a heartwarming indicator of his dedication. They are illustrated by the precocious paintings of his talented students, who justified their early promise in later years. The calligraphy is done with great care. Mr Gopalan took great pains in collecting photographs to illustrate the articles. He himself wrote articles and illustrated them.

The magazines are another evidence of his staunch nationalism. The articles are on subjects very close to a patriot's heart of those days. Leafing through them one

suddenly comes across a rare photograph of Netaji or a message from Rajaji.

Over the years the school has grown from a group of thatched huts in 1932 to a fine building in 1942, which is the main school with more than 2000 students. The Ramakrishna Mission schools in Theagarayanagar now are a complex of three high schools for boys and three elementary schools.

The strength of the high school is more than 2000. Class-rooms are over-crowded. The headmaster referred to the problem himself in his characteristic way. "Can you recall the hum that is part of a class room in session when you were in school?. The strength of a class was then 40. Now it is seventy to a class. Imagine the volume of the sound now." He left unsaid, the attendant problems to school and teachers.

Restored Order

Mr Gopalan was the headmaster of the north school when he was asked to take over at short notice the main school, rent by student strife, in January 1971.

Mr Gopalan's record stood him in good stead. The magazine had developed into a printed annual event of merit over the years. A Parents Teacher association had established a means of communication with parents and Mr. O. V. Gopalan's intimate

association with these activities gave him the initiative to restore order out of a freakish chaos that had set temporarily. He dealt with the situation firmly but justly and won the respect of his colleagues and what was more important to him, of his boys.

Mr. O.V. Gopalan glossed over this period of his taking over to dwell on the extra curricular activities of his boys. There is a tennis court, well maintained now, in addition to other sports activities. The Headmaster sensing his boys' wishes once invited Venkataraghavan to the school to their immense pride and delight. Existing facilities like the school magazine, library and the Parent-Teacher Association have expanded their activities. The old boys association has been

revived. A music association 'Kalavardhani' has been formed.

School Excursions

He is modestly proud of the school excursions he has organised since 1971 which took his boys across the Peninsula in the south once and to the Himalayas in Kashmir in 1972. He took the opportunity to take his boys to Delhi and got them an audience with the President.

He has also organised, with unmatched success, school exhibitions which drew huge crowds for the variety and quality of its interesting sections. They were a capsuled education-tour for the public, incidentally proclaiming the flowering of live minds in a congenial atmosphere.

This climate then is what Mr. Gopalan is capable of creating. He is not a man given to dwell upon himself or his achievements. The information he passes on to you are matter of fact and sparse in their detail. He lets facts speak for themselves. And the fact is that the city can justifiably be proud of an institution that parents can safely entrust their boys to its care.

Recently a distraught parent unable to get admission in a much-sought-after school, was advised by its headmistress to go to the Ramakrishna Mission Boys School. "It has a fine headmaster" she said. And that about seems to sum up Mr. Gopalan as a headmasters' headmaster.



Rajaji & Lohia

When I met Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia some days ago, he was an angry and unhappy man; he had good reason to be. But it was pleasant to note his affection. He told a good story about his first meeting me years ago which I had entirely forgotten. It seems he said that he cared a tuppence for the Working Committee's resolutions and that I replied, "I thought you would swear by Russian currency and not by British currency." A thirty-five-year-old joke but enjoyable even now and perhaps also relevant to present-day politics

—Swarajya, May 27, 1967